

# ACNE STUDIOS LABORATOIRE PARISIEN

Photography by Cobey Arner  
Words by Jack Stanley







Arriving at Acne Studios' new Paris headquarters – tucked down Rue des Petites Écuries, an inauspicious street in the 10th arrondissement – visitors are greeted with a small, peaceful courtyard. The stark white walls of the courtyard frame a single marble sculpture, giving a clue to the building's past and present. Rather than a classical sculpture, this is the work of artist Daniel Silver, who has worked with Acne Studios on a number of projects throughout the brand's three decades.

After walking through the courtyard and up the stone staircase, guests arrive in the reception area, which immediately introduces you to a traditional grand Parisian house; there are gold-painted mouldings, carefully restored to return the room to its former glory, as well as wood panelling and a patterned parquet floor. A set of doors at the end of the reception room leads into an unexpected and surprising addition: a vast concrete extension, with industrial columns and a glass-tiled ceiling, that was once a laboratory, and reveals the unique history of Acne Studios' new office. The building previously belonged to the Prévot family, prominent industrialists who founded the Gomenol company in the late 19th century. Gomenol was known for its production of herbal tinctures and oils, many of which were honed and developed in the large laboratory that they added to the back of their Parisian hôtel particulier.

*"The space is so interesting, what has been here before, the idea of the history,"* says Jonny Johansson, Acne Studios' co-founder and creative director. *"There is a laboratory and also these very classical French golden rooms. That juxtaposition is what I'm always looking for in fashion in general. It's this idea of a ball gown meets jeans."*

Juxtaposition runs throughout the very structure of the Acne headquarters, where the industrial laboratory comes up against the luxury of the grand Parisian house. *"I don't want to take the contrast away,"* explains Johansson. The process of restoring, renovating and preparing the office was a partnership between Acne Studios and Stockholm architects Halleroed whose founder, Christian, has known Johansson since they were children. This common history has created a shared language between Johansson and Halleroed.



Seating by Lukas Gschwandtner.





In the showroom, custom furniture was designed by Max Lamb.

*“When I was younger in Stockholm, we were in the same clique, we were young creative kids,” says Johansson. “I feel really safe and secure with him. He has an aesthetic but it’s still flexible. He doesn’t give the same aesthetic to everyone.”* After so many years of working together, the Halleroed team – led by Christian and his wife Ruxandra – have a way of working alongside Johansson. *“When you get to know Jonny you can really understand what he wants,”* says Christian. *“It’s a luxury to have someone that you really know in that way to work on projects with. It’s very fun to work with him because he’s genuinely interested in furniture, interior design, art, and he has a good eye for it.”*

A key element of the office on rue des Petites Écuries is the juxtaposition of old and new. New additions, whether architectural necessities or added furniture, never pretend to be contemporaries of the original building. Instead, there’s a stark line between the two. *“Quite early, we found a strategy for how we would treat the new,”* says Ruxandra Halleroed. *“There’s a lot of new infrastructure you need for a modern office, we needed new walls, new toilets, new storage. We found a way to do that without destroying the overall space. All of the new additions are very minimal, there are no profiles or visible details. They’re very obviously new, and they’re a contrast with the old space.”*

Along with the practical considerations needed for an office, the design needed to factor in the ways that people will move through the space, how they will work together and how the disparate teams will function as one organism. *“I always see our offices as design schools,”* says Johansson. *“They’re a bit more democratic, more open environments, the type of place where you see the hopelessly old ones with the hopelessly young ones.”*



A Jonathan Lyndon Chase chair in the canteen.



The democratic approach, with different teams and roles alongside one another, is a contrast to other ways of working that Johansson has experienced. Visiting another company 15 years ago, Johansson ran into some friends who worked there at the reception. When he told them which floor he was visiting, they told him they weren't allowed to go up to that floor. *"That always stuck with me,"* he says. *"That sort of hierarchy is what we don't want to be."*

In Paris, that means a focus on communal spaces, including a small garden filled with marble tables and seating designed by Max Lamb. Nearby is a canteen, with a stainless steel kitchen, where the team can share meals over long blond wood tables. *"We always have a canteen, because that's where people meet naturally,"* says Johansson. *"Even if people are pissed at each other, they have to meet there in some way. Or if they want to see someone they have a crush on, they will see them in the canteen not in their office."*

Across every aspect of the office's design lies the contrast between old and new, where traditional Parisian beauty sits alongside brutal concrete and modern design.

This approach shows an evolution of Acne Studios. Their Stockholm headquarters is situated in an old Czech embassy, a brooding concrete structure filled with right angles and straight lines. In Paris, however, there are the mouldings, the ornate mirrors and the sense of grand luxury. In part, this is Acne Studios, and Johansson, growing up.

*"I see this as a collaborative brand, not just me, but I've been the skipper,"* Johansson says. *"I got older. I remember feeling rebellious and young, thinking I knew more than people because they were older. Now I see people and they look at me like a dinosaur."* Growing up has also seen Johansson change his perspective. *"I used to think about rebellion a lot, but I've lost that for sure, it doesn't interest me that much,"* he says. *"If you go to design school in Stockholm, you learn that ugly is the right thing, which I like the idea of. But when there is no beauty and beauty is not accepted, I find something is getting lost. The hard thing sometimes is to do something very beautiful."* Johansson could be speaking about the office on rue des Petites Écuries, where classical Parisian beauty sits alongside the brutal concrete laboratory.



A ceramic sculpture by Daniel Silver in the waiting room.





Seating by Lukas Gschwandtner and lighting by Benoit Lalloz in the VIP fitting rooms.

A Daniel Silver sculpture greets guests in the front courtyard.



While Halleroed and Acne Studios have worked together often in the past, the office also draws on many of Johansson's other frequent collaborators. Max Lamb seating can be found in the private garden and showroom, artworks by Jonathan Lyndon Chase appear throughout the building and furniture has been commissioned from Lukas Gschwandtner. A particular stand-out is a huge chaise longue, designed by Gschwandtner featuring fragments of antique chairs in a stark white surround. Arguably more than any other piece, it represents the convergence of new and old that runs through every element of the Acne Studios building.

*"The chaise longue is three or four meters long, with all of these historical seats on top of it," says Gschwandtner. "It's a suggestion of different chairs, all placed together as one piece of furniture. When we installed it into the room, with white panelling and golden ornaments, it almost camouflaged into the space. There are all these layers of history, and the chaise longue itself is so muted, it's a silent partner. It's just there to support these fragments that are floating around the room. It seems very natural that it's in there."*

The eclecticism of Acne Studios' collaborators is an extension of the eclecticism of the building itself. Each artist, designer or architect, whether its Halleroed, Lamb, Gschwandtner or any of the others, was asked to bring their own approach to the project. *"The beautiful thing with Jonny is that he really lets me do it, he's great to work with,"* says Gschwandtner. *"He's more interested in the vision of the artists and the partners he works with. We find ways of fitting it into the project and that's quite beautiful."*

For Johansson, this process comes from trust. All of his collaborators are people he has returned to repeatedly over the years, who bring something special to every project they work on together. *"When you have people who you trust, you can leave the decision with them,"* he says. *"The only thing that's important to me is the structural side, that everything leads to one another, that the aesthetic is where we want it to be. It doesn't need to be a bullseye, but it needs to be on the dart board."*





Johansson's relationship with these designers, makers and artists comes from his desire for each location to have specially made furniture and objects. Whereas other stores may turn to familiar design favourites, Acne embraces the craftspeople and their creations. *"If you go to an art fair, and you look into the booths, all of the galleries have the same thing,"* Johansson says, by way of an example. *"It's a good choice, you have great taste, but you don't say anything with it. Why did they choose these iconic vintage pieces? When they have the possibility of making something, why don't they have somebody make something for them? Why are you just showing good taste, when you're not actually creating things yourself?"*

With the office on rue des Petites Écuries, Johansson is creating something himself; it's a building that exists in different layers, with the different histories, the different tensions and the different collaborators all shaping the building in their own ways. The result is something unique, far more than the sum of its parts, that speaks to the history of Acne Studios and how, over the last three decades, a rebellious Swedish upstart has found itself in the middle of Paris.

